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ABSTRACT

The ways in which assessment materials developed for the Speaking and Listening strand of the Australian English Profile have helped refine the continuum of skill growth are explored. In Australia, profiles map the progress of learning during compulsory schooling. Each profile is divided into strands representing critical areas of a learning domain. A strand is a common framework that can be used to chart student progress. Achievement, which is divided into eight levels in each strand, is measured by various assessment materials, development of which illustrates the refinement of the continuum of skill growth. Selection of a level of focus enables contextualization of outcomes and pointers. These contexts then force the refinement of the continuum by demanding a more particular conceptualization of growth. The items and the way they are scored leads to recognition of student response levels. Analysis of fit statistics then clarifies the relationship between the profile substrands, and descriptions of item clusters inform the level descriptions of the profile. Two appendixes describe the levels and some tasks. Thirteen figures illustrate the discussion. (Contains 5 references.) (SLD)

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ED 376 185

USING ASSESSMENT MATERIALS TO REFINE A CONTINUUM OF SKILL GROWTH

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This paper looks at the ways in which assessment materials developed for the Speaking and Listening 'strand' of the Australian English 'Profile' have helped refine that continuum of skill growth. A brief introduction describes the concepts of a 'profile' and a 'strand'. The relationship between the described Speaking and Listening continuum and actual student performance is then explored. The paper shows how the conceptualisation of assessment contexts, the test construction process and the analysis of actual student performance add detail to descriptions of skill growth.

PROFILES AND STRANDS

The Australian 'Profiles' have been developed to map the progress of learning during the compulsory years of school (years 1-10). Each profile is divided into 'strands', or critical areas of a learning domain. A profile strand can be conceptualised as an achievement continuum; a 'map' of student progress, which describes what it means to show increasing competence in an area of learning. It does not attempt to prescribe or describe how learning takes place and is therefore not a curriculum document. Nor is it an assessment instrument. It is, rather, a common reporting framework, a common language, which can be used by teachers, schools or whole systems to 'chart' student progress.

Each profile strand is divided into eight levels of achievement. These levels, which do not correspond to particular age or grade levels, describe increasing achievement in the area of learning (Figure 1).

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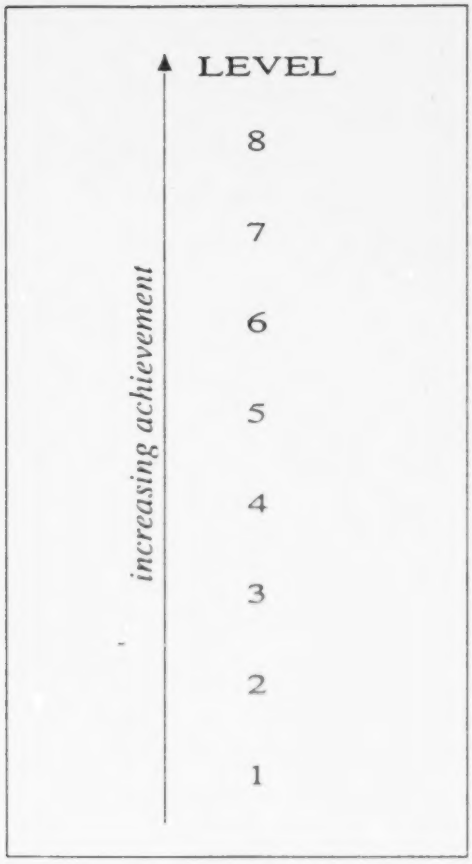

Figure 1. Achievement levels on a profile strand

Profile strands are further subdivided into 'sub-strands'. In the case of English, the three strands of reading and viewing, speaking and listening, and writing are subdivided into texts, contextual understandings, linguistic structures and features, and strategies. The strand and sub-strand descriptions for each level of performance have been developed 'top down' by experts in the field. (An alternative method, perhaps more accurate and certainly more time consuming, would have been to collect evidence of actual student performance from years 1-10 and to develop level descriptors from analyses of student performances.)

Descriptions of performance take the form of a set of briefly worded 'outcome' statements which in turn are elaborated by 'pointers', or examples of observable student performances. The pointers are not comprehensive descriptions of an outcome but attempt to give greater meaning to general level descriptors; they are *indicators* of the level of achievement. The outcomes for level 4 of the Speaking and Listening strand of the English profile are shown in Figure 2. Corresponding pointers for the 'text' sub-strand are shown in Figure 3 (Curriculum Corporation, 1993).

Texts	Contextual Understanding	Linguistic Structures and Features	Strategies
4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.	4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.	4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.	4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.

Figure 2 Outcome Statements for Speaking and Listening Level 4

Sub-strand: Texts
Outcome (level 4):

Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.

Pointers:
This will be evident when students, for example:

- Present a strong point of view to friends in a group offering some considered reasons or arguments.
- Listen attentively and respond constructively to other points of view in group and class discussion.
- Rehearse and tell a story to peers or younger children, using approaches that attempt to engage listeners.
- Prepare and present to the class a detailed account on a known topic, showing attention to quality of content, organisation and method of presentation.
- Prepare a short set of questions for an interview seeking information about an issue or topic.
- Offer explanations or lodge complaints which include one or two reasoned arguments.
- Listen and respond to short presentations or arguments that offer alternative viewpoints on a familiar issue (challenge or comment on a point made).
- Identify the main idea and supporting details of a spoken report and summarise it for others (presentations by peers or guest speakers on environmental issues, a current affairs report).

Figure 3 Pointers for the 'text' sub-strand (level 4)

The challenge for the teacher, the school, or the system at large, is to infer a student's level of achievement, as described in the profile, from observations of that student's performances. Clearly this will not be possible unless the described levels of performance adequately match the developing skills of the student.

> For this reason it is essential that the construction of a strand is based not only on adult opinion, but also on empirical evidence about how students typically progress in an area of learning. To the extent that the ordering of achievements along a strand does not match the order typically observed in classrooms, the usefulness of that strand as a frame of reference for estimating and reporting students' levels of achievement will be diminished.
>
> (Masters, 1993,3)

How well the described levels of performance match the order of typical student progress is in turn dependent on the clarity and detail of the level descriptions. Outcomes are often worded so generally that they are applicable at a range of levels of achievement, depending on context. This has been noted by Wolf (1991, 198) in the context of the U.K. national curriculum:

> While such [outcome] Statements were certainly intended, by their authors, to convey clear standards, experience suggests the reverse. [Outcome] Statements are decontextualised (and so could apply to many levels of difficulty). They are nonetheless assigned to one particular level. Hence, one is constantly frustrated to find difficult problems in, say, maths or science which contain only what are supposedly Level 3 skills: and fairly easy ones where the particular task or skill makes something a supposed Level 10.

The following outcome from the Speaking and Listening strand provides a good example of an outcome that is worded so generally that it could be applicable to a range of levels of achievement: 'Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact'. (In the profile the outcome is allocated at level 3, Texts sub-strand.)

ASSESSMENT MATERIALS AS CONTEXTS FOR OBSERVATIONS

One way of grounding the outcomes and giving them more meaning is through the development of assessment materials. Focusing on the *context for observation* of student performance, forces a detailed exploration of the relationship between the described outcomes and what students actually do at a broad 'stage of development'. In recognising that different observational contexts may be appropriate for different

ages and year levels, one is able to inform the descriptions of skill development within a particular range on the continuum. One is unlikely then to define the continua only in terms of the emergence of new skills, 'context free'. This is not to suggest that all skills exist from the start of school and that only contexts change. Rather that the descriptions of growth should capture both the emergence of new skills and the ability to apply skills in increasingly challenging contexts.

The assessment materials which are the focus for this discussion are part of the DART, A Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers. The package aims to provide upper primary teachers with a series of standardised assessment materials which will assist them to make reliable judgements of student performance at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the profile in Reading and Viewing, Speaking and Listening, and Writing. The development of the Speaking and Listening assessments illustrates several ways in which such materials can refine and inform a continuum of skill growth:

1 through the *conceptualisation* of what it means to develop listening and speaking skills (How well do the profile descriptions assist in the reporting of levels of performance when one has specific contexts for the assessment of speaking and listening in the upper primary classroom in mind?);
2 through the *kind of assessment* or answer format used;
3 through *analysis of the fit statistics* for the tasks developed and
4 through the *description of item clusters* for particular tasks.

conceptualisation

If one thinks about the kinds of contexts in which students at upper primary level develop and practise speaking and listening skills then a range of activities such as listening for information, participating in small group discussion and giving a formal talk come to mind. One can conceptualise these listening and speaking activities along a 'contexts' continuum, with listening at one end, speaking at the other, and an interactive 'middle ground'.

The speaking and listening strand of the Australian English Profile emphasises this interactive middle ground. Figure 4 shows speaking and listening outcomes for the sub-strands of texts, contextual understandings, linguistic structures and features, and strategies, at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the profile. The pointers for each outcome (see Appendix 1), particularly for the texts sub-strand, make this interactive emphasis clear.

	Texts	Contextual understanding	Linguistic structures and features	Strategies
level 5	5.1 Interacts with peers in structured situations, using a variety of text types to discuss familiar or accessible subjects involving challenging ideas and issues.	5.2 Identifies the effect of context, audience and purpose on spoken texts.	5.3 Discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.	5.4 Listens strategically and systematically records spoken information.
level 4	4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.	4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.	4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.	4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.
level 3	3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.	3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.	3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.	3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.
level 2	2.1 Interacts in more confident and extended ways in structured and spontaneous school situations.	2.2 Considers how own speaking and listening is adjusted in different situations.	2.3 Experiments with different linguistic structures and features for expressing and interpreting spoken ideas and information.	2.4 Speaks and listens in ways that assist communication with others.

Figure 4 Outcome Statements for Speaking and Listening (levels 2-5)

The development of listening as a means of receiving information is sketchily outlined. Listening specifically for *information*, does not appear as an outcome until level 5 of the Strategies sub-strand, although within the Texts sub-strand listening for information is mentioned as a pointer. At level 2 it appears as part of discussion activity: 'Listen attentively to and converse with others for a purpose..', 'Listen to and comment positively on the contributions of others in group and class activity'. At level 3 it

appears directly: 'Listen to and obtain specific information from spoken texts and retell this to others..'; and at level 4: 'Identify the main idea and supporting details of a spoken report and summarise it for others..', 'Make brief notes or tape record interviews for later review of information'. Is a level 5 listening performance distinguished from a level 3 listening performance only on the basis of whether or not the information is recorded or retold to others? If so, what does it mean to listen well at level 4?

The signposts for the development of speaking skills are similarly underdeveloped. Level 4 of the Linguistic structures and features sub-strand (Figure 5), offers the most detail here with half of the pointers referring to speaking 'performance'.

Sub-strand: Linguistic structures and features
Outcome (level 4):

Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations

Pointers:
This will be evident when students, for example:

- Select, order and organise subject matter clearly for prepared spoken presentations (a report to the class, oral instructions to a group).
- Use conjunctions to interpret and express causal and temporal relationships between ideas in texts.
- Use, pace, volume, pronunciation, enunciation and stress to enhance meaning (in a rehearsed reading of a story with dialogue).
- Use body movement, facial expression and gestures to enhance meaning (in a role in a play, telling a story).
- Recognise introductory phrases which indicate that an opinion is being offered ('I believe that...', 'I feel that ...', 'In my opinion...')
- Adopt the grammatical patterns of standard Australian English where suitable (role playing a television newsreader, making a formal presentation at a school assembly, introducing a guest speaker.

Figure 5 Pointers for Linguistic structures and features sub-strand (level 4)

What does it mean to develop and present ideas and information with *less or more control* of the linguistic structures and features of spoken language? What does speaking performance look like at levels 2, 3 and 5?

In grounding the assessment of speaking and listening in actual contexts that sample student performance in a range of listening, interactive speaking and listening, and speaking activities DART assessment tasks add detail to the description of development outlined in the profile.

assessment format - short answer and teacher judgement

The assessment format for DART refines the continuum either through information gained from students' multi-level responses to the written items or teacher judgements of the performance components of DART. Most of the listening test uses a short answer format. This 'open-endedness' allows for judgements of the conceptual level of answers to be made. Thus answers to the one question, by eliciting different kinds of responses, can potentially span several levels of the profile and directly inform the continuum.

The work done for the Western Australian Monitoring Standards Project provides a model here (Titmanis, P. et al., 1993). Test developers predict the categories of responses that students might make to a proposed non dichotomous item, where those categories are thought to represent conceptually different responses. The categories are confirmed or expanded during the marking of responses during trial testing. On analysis the 'categories' are confirmed on the basis of significantly separated item estimates. If the item estimates for the separate categories of response are close then the categories are collapsed. So a proposed 2-step or even 3-step item can become dichotomous after initial analysis. Where the categories remain separate through to final analysis the description of performance for a higher or lower category helps to detail growth in the particular strand, both reflecting and refining the continuum.

An example from DART listening explains the process. In one of the tasks students listen to a talk-back radio show. The callers are ringing in response to a letter from a girl, Hannah, who expresses concern that children's films are dominated by male characters. Students are asked to write down whether each caller agrees or disagrees with Hannah and why the caller agrees or disagrees with Hannah. The final caller, Kon, gives a complex response. Below is a transcript from that section of the tape:

Kon: Is that Dave Fabiny?
Dave: Yes, go ahead Kon. What's your opinion here?
Kon: Hi! I just wanted to say that I think that the people who make films want to make money, right?
Dave: That's pretty important, yes.
Kon: And I think that when they're making a film for kids, they want a big audience, right?
Dave: Absolutely, so what's your point, Kon?
Kon: Well, I don't think boys are interested in watching girls in movies, but I think boys and girls are both more interested in watching boys.
Dave: Is that true? What makes you think that, Kon?
Kon: Um, yeah, it's just like little kids and older kids both like teen-age movies, but kids of say, 15 or 16, they wouldn't watch Playschool, would they?
Dave: So what are you saying here? Do you think there is a bias against girls in films: That there are more big parts for boys than girls?
Kon: Yeah, that's obvious. But that's because more people will watch a film about boys.
Dave: So do you think that's Okay? Is that how it should be?

Kon: Well, I don't know. Maybe it would be better if people who made films didn't only think about making money, but...

Dave: Yes, that might be pretty hard to get around. Maybe it's in the pigs might fly category...But, you never know, the world is changing...And that might be a good place to round this one up, and take a break with some more music from Danny's Egg...

Each student's response to this task is allocated to one of two categories. The best response (receiving 2 score points) summarises Kon's explanation in terms of money and audience appeal. Students will integrate closely related pieces of information from material that is less explicit and more confusing than that in other parts of the task. (Kon implies but does not state that he agrees or probably agrees with Hannah.) Less adequate or sophisticated responses (receiving 1 score point) miss the complexity, answering either in terms of audience appeal or money.

When the listening items are Rasch scaled the threshold estimates for the Kon item (item 46) are as follows: category 1, -0.06, category 2, 2.83. This is on a scale where the easiest item has an estimate of -2.37 and the most difficult an estimate of 2.98 (Figure 9). A description of the kinds of performance associated with each category of response enriches the level descriptions of the Speaking and Listening strand of the English profile.

The speaking assessments require teachers to make global judgements of student performance. The categories of performance reflect the levels of the profile strand but are elaborated for the particular assessment task. Through this elaboration demanded by the specific context for assessment the profile levels are refined. One example should suffice.

One of the speaking and listening tasks is the 'Forum'. Here students offer their opinion to the class on a topic of their choice (from a given selection). The task is preceded by small group discussion. Profile pointers relevant to the Forum task are listed in Figure 6. There are no relevant pointers at level 2.

Profile level 5
texts:
- Give prepared talks to the class on familiar or accessible subjects, pointing out more complex aspects of the topic (world news related to the theme of a novel being studied in class).

Profile level 4
texts:
- Prepare and present to the class a detailed account on a known topic, showing attention to quality of content, organisation and method of presentation.

linguistic structures and features:
- Select, order and organise subject matter clearly for prepared spoken presentation (a report to the class, oral instructions to a group).
- Use pace, volume, pronunciation, enunciation and stress to enhance meaning (in a rehearsed reading of a story with dialogue).

Profile level 3
texts:
- Deliver a prepared short talk to peers on a topic of mutual interest, giving mostly relevant, organised information.

strategies:
- Select and organise ideas before giving a short prepared talk (list main ideas on cue cards).

Figure 6 Relevant pointers for 'Forum' activity

These pointers indicate an increasing conceptual achievement from levels 3 to 5. At a lower level of achievement the student covers most relevant information and at a higher level deals with complex aspects of a topic. A development in the control of presentation is less obvious. The marking guide developed for the forum activity asks teachers to observe student presentation of their opinion to the class audience and make two separate judgements on the 'quality of content' and on 'performance', thus adding detail to both content and presentation performance for four profile levels (level 2-5).

It is clear from the marking guide (Figure 7) that performance categories C, B and A of 'quality of content' reflect and refine levels 3, 4 and 5 of the profile. Category D extrapolates a lower level of performance (profile level 2). Category A expands the content measure to include elements of performance observed in the 'best' speakers. Similarly, categories D, C, and A of the 'quality of performance' extrapolate both down and up from the relevant level 4 pointer: 'Use pace, volume, pronunciation, enunciation and stress to enhance meaning (in a rehearsed reading of a story with dialogue)'. This enriches the levels above and below an already described section of the continuum. A second Forum marking guide (Figure 8) with the added level descriptors in italics makes the refinements obvious.

quality of content	quality of performance
PERFORMANCE CATEGORY A Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will show a sense of kev issues and present challenging ideas. • They will show that they are aware of the underlying or unstated parts of opinions and arguments.	**PERFORMANCE CATEGORY A** Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will use language expressively and persuasively. • They will use both rational and emotive devices to try to influence the audience.
PERFORMANCE CATEGORY B Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • Their speech will be clearly organised and will focus on relevant ideas in some detail.	**PERFORMANCE CATEGORY B** Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will be clear and articulate in the delivery of their opinion. • They will be conscious of the audience's reactions and adjust their speech accordingly.
PERFORMANCE CATEGORY C Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • Their speech will be mostly relevant, offering a few reasoned arguments. • Their speech will show some evidence of planning.	**PERFORMANCE CATEGORY C** Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will use appropriate expression and try to engage the audience. • They will be aware that they need to communicate.
PERFORMANCE CATEGORY D Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will understand the topic and present some relevant ideas.	**PERFORMANCE CATEGORY D** Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined): • They will speak in such a way as to be understood. • They will observe the rules of the forum.

Figure 7 Marking guide for Forum task

quality of content

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY A
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- They will show a sense of key issues and present challenging ideas.
- *They will show that they are aware of the underlying or unstated parts of opinions and arguments.*

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY B
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- Their speech will be clearly organised and will focus on relevant ideas in some detail.

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY C
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- Their speech will be mostly relevant, offering a few reasoned arguments.
- *Their speech will show some evidence of planning.*

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY D
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- *They will understand the topic and present some relevant ideas.*

quality of performance

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY A
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- *They will use language expressively and persuasively.*
- *They will use both rational and emotive devices to try to influence the audience.*

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY B
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- *They will be clear and articulate in the delivery of their opinion.*
- They will be conscious of the audience's reactions and adjust their speech accordingly.

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY C
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- *They will use appropriate expression and try to engage the audience.*
- *They will be aware that they need to communicate.*

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY D
Characteristics of students performing at this level (key words underlined):

- *They will speak in such a way as to be understood.*
- *They will observe the rules of the forum.*

Figure 8 Marking guide for forum task with additional level descriptors in italics

analysis of fit statistics

The analysis of the fit statistics from the component parts of DART speaking and listening adds definition to the relationship between the sub-strands of the profile. Three listening tasks, three performance (speaking) tasks and five small group discussion (interactive speaking and listening) tasks were pilot tested for the DART package. (Appendix 2 details the tasks.) The initial analysis scaled all tasks together. Later they were rescaled on subscales for listening, interactive speaking and listening (small group discussion) and performance (speaking). Figure 9 shows the fit statistics

for the initial analysis. The role play performance task (item 8), designed specifically to assess the contextual sub-strand clearly operates in a different way from the other performance tasks. This finding is confirmed by the performance sub-scale analysis (Figure 10).

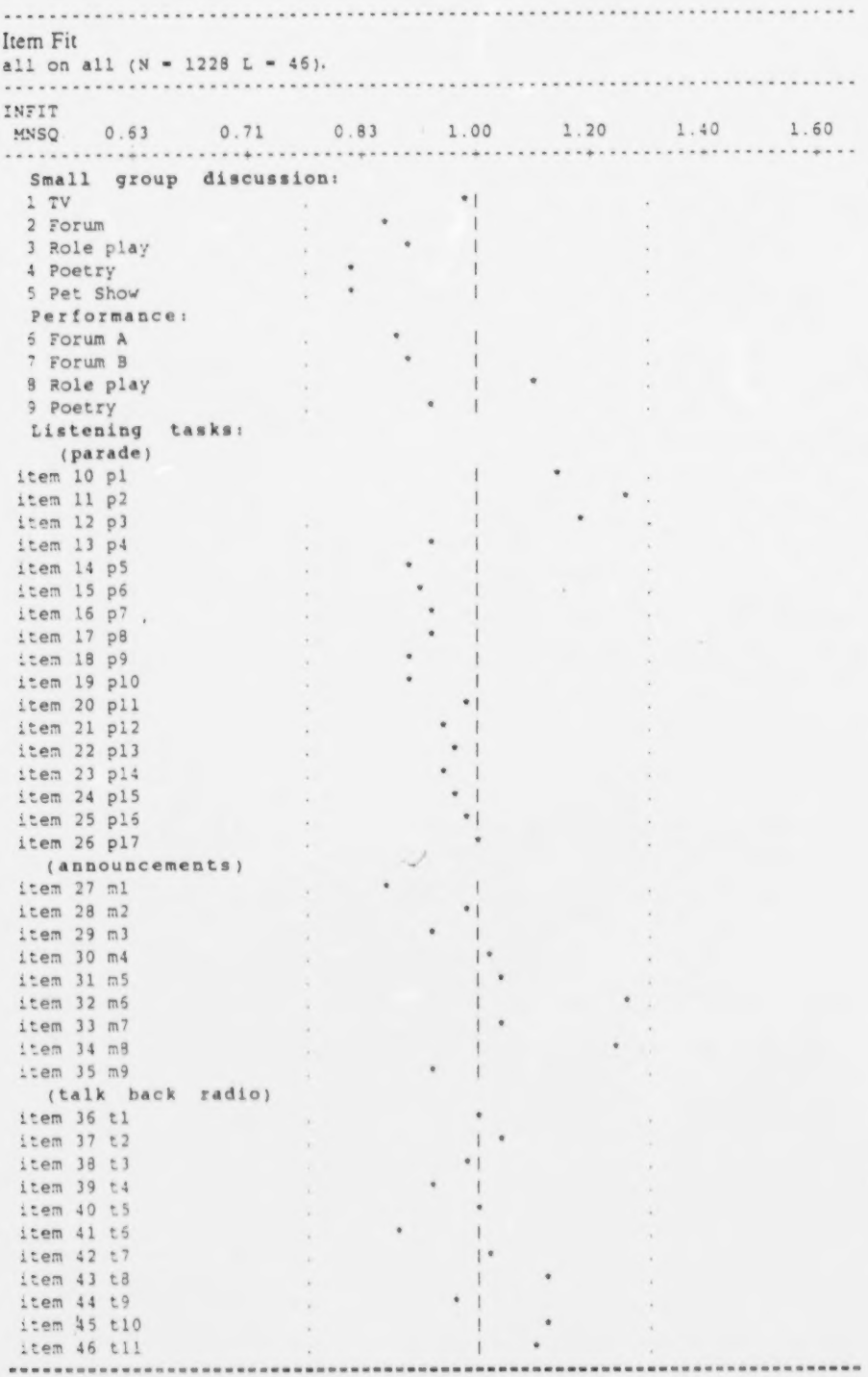

Figure 9 Fit statistics - all Speaking and Listening tasks

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```
Item Fit
all on all (N = 1228 L = 4)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
INFIT
 MNSQ    0.63       0.71       0.83       1.00       1.20       1.40       1.60
----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+---
  1 Forum A                .  *          |                .
  2 Forum B                .     *       |                .
  3 Role pla               .             |                *
  4 Poetry p               .          *  |                .
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Figure 10 Fit statistics - Performance tasks only

On reflection, this makes sense as the task requires a much higher cognitive input than the other performance tasks. Students are asked to reflect on the ways in which language is used differently in more or less formal situations, to write two scripts and then perform two separate role plays. This intuition about levels of cognitive input is supported by the fit statistics for the interactive speaking and listening subscale. (Figure 8). Here 'forum' stands out. The task demands a less personal and informal approach, or a 'higher cognitive loading, than the other small group discussions.

```
Item Fit
all on all (N = 1228 L = 5)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
INFIT
 MNSQ    0.53       0.63       0.77       1.00       1.30       1.60       1.90
----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+----------+---
  1 TV                          .          *|          .
  2 Forum          *            .          |          .
  3 Role pla                    .          | *        .
  4 Poetry                      .          |   *      .
  5 Pet Show                    .          |  *       .
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Figure 11 Fit statistics - Small group discussion

The analysis suggests that the development of contextual understandings, as conceptualised in the profile sub-strand, (and as translated into the particular assessment tasks) would be better reported separately. Thus the use of fit statistics in the analysis of assessment tasks refines the continuum by clarifying the relationships between sub-strands.

description of item clusters

The *level descriptions* of the speaking and listening strand are also enriched through descriptions of item clusters as they appear with item calibration. The final item estimates for the listening scale are shown in Figure 12.

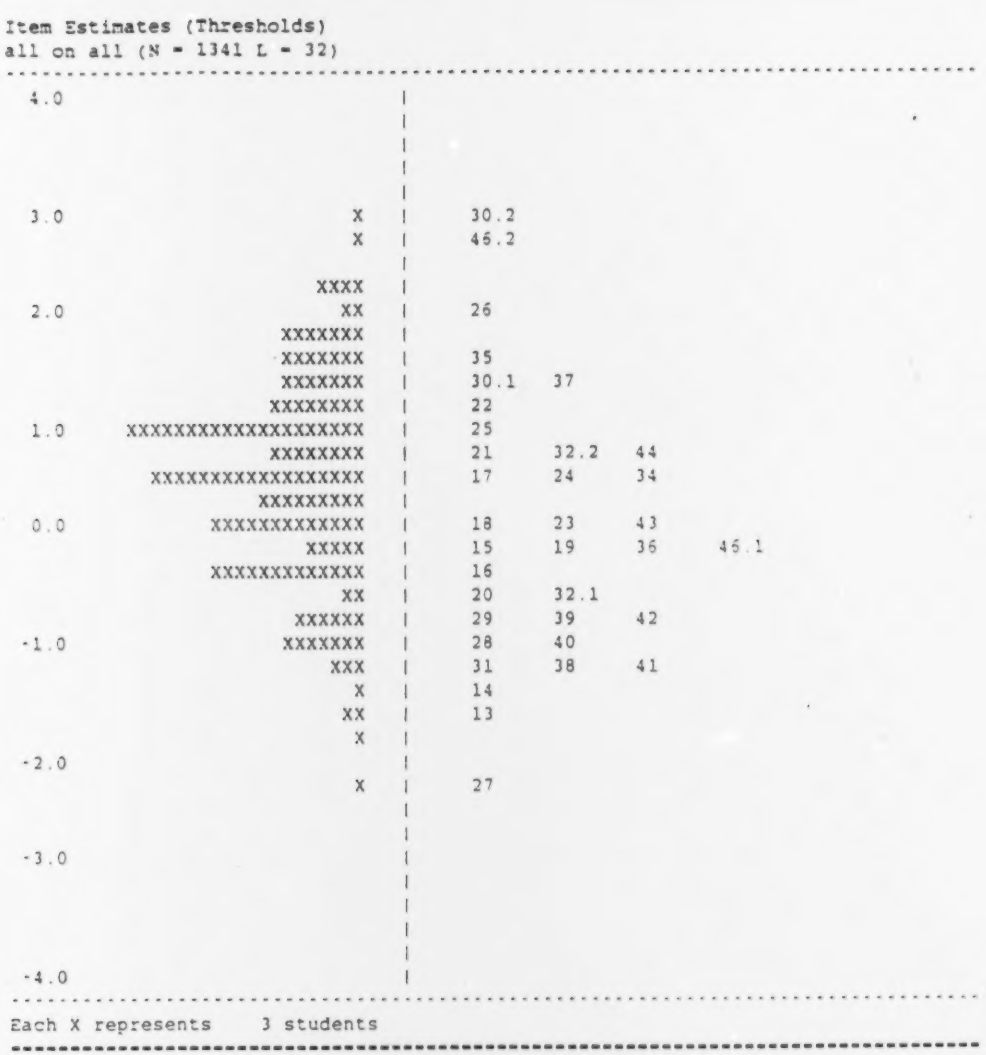

Figure 12 Item estimates for the listening scale

The 13 easiest items are items that fall at or near the beginning of each of the listening tasks. There is little competing information with which to contend and the answers are simple and clear. For example, Item 41 requires students to note down that talk back radio caller (Rachel) says in defense of her position: 'boys are boring'. Contrast this with the length and complexity of Kon's response (Items 46.1 and 46.2, cited earlier).

The items that fall approximately from items 20 through to 22 require a more sustained concentration from the students. They do not appear near the beginning of the tasks and there is some competing information with which to contend. Item 34, for example asks that the students recognise the second point that a talk back radio participant (Kylie) makes in a longer 'speech' than that made by Rachel Item 41, but less complex

than that made by Kon. (Item 42 requires students to recognise the first more obvious point made by Kylie and this item falls in the first 'bracket' of items.)

The 6 most difficult items require that the students sort out closely related pieces of information or draw inferences from less explicit material. As noted earlier, Item 46.2 requires students to integrate closely related pieces of information from material that is less explicit and more confusing than in other parts of the task. Item 35 similarly requires students to both draw an inference and sort out less explicit information. This question comes from a two-part set of listening tasks. First students listen to their 'mother' and then to a series of announcements. They are asked to write down some points of information that their mother wants, then listen for the information when the announcements are made. She is not able to listen to the announcements herself as she is returning to the car to get the sunscreen which she hopes she has left on the front seat. The mother asks for 3 specific pieces of information about sports events and food and *anything else important* she should know. In Item 35 students are given a single score point if they note down that sunscreen is available at the information caravan. Students have to draw an inference that this information is in the 'anything else important' category. They have to extract it from a lot of extraneous information and they have to do so towards the end of the tape.

If we place the listening items and the performance items on the same scale (Figure 13) we see that *all* of the listening items fall below the first cluster of items, the '.3s'. These .3 items are the category A performance judgements made by teachers in the 3 speaking (performance) tasks. These judgements are designed to reflect level 5 of the speaking and listening strand. Thus the DART listening tasks add information to levels 2, 3 and 4 of the speaking and listening continuum. Given that listening specifically for information does not appear before a level 5 outcome , 'listens strategically and systematically records spoken information' all of the final descriptors developed from these listening items will enrich and inform the levels, particularly levels 2 to 4.

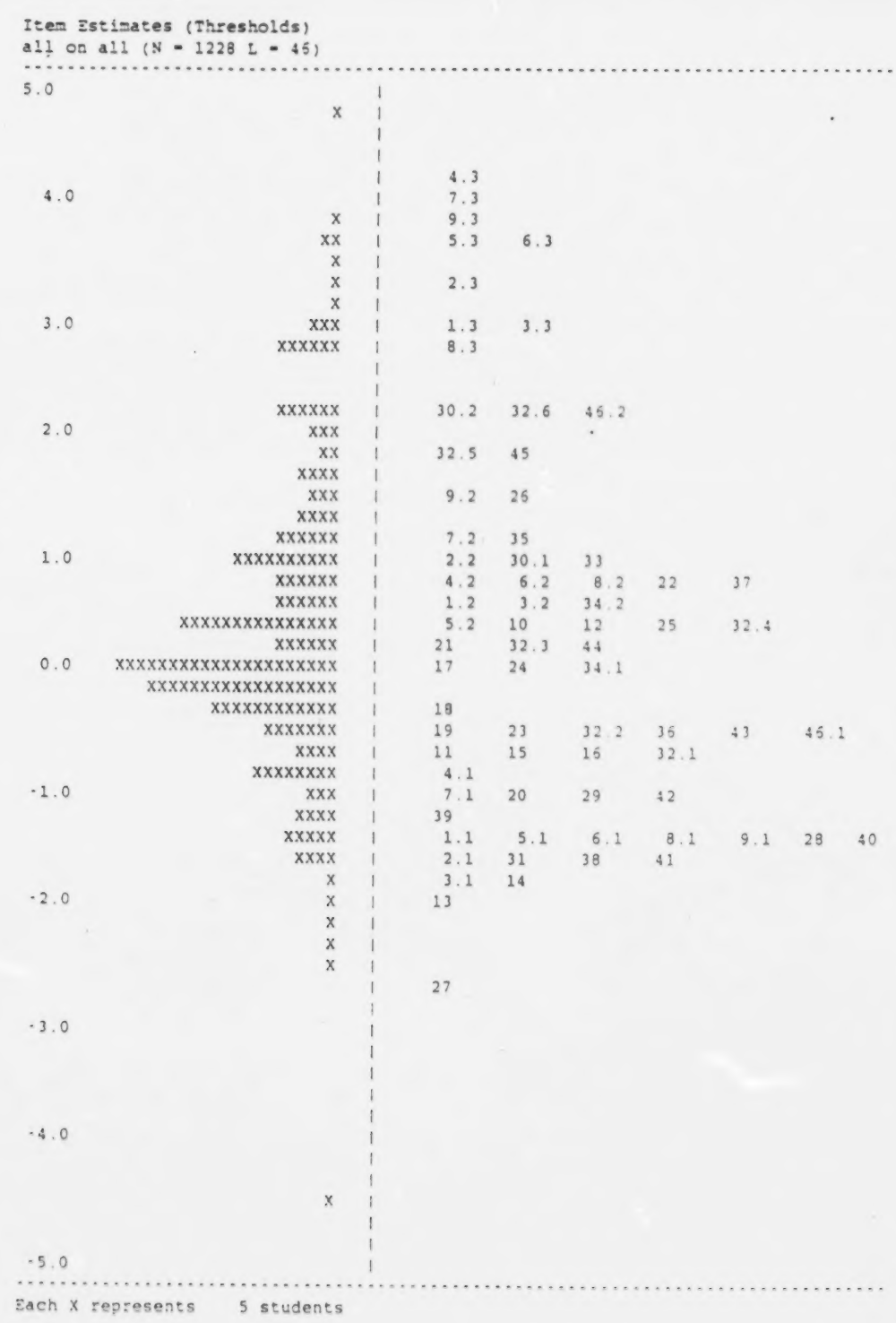

Figure 13 Item estimates for Speaking and Listening tasks

summary and conclusions

This paper has described how the development of assessment materials can help to refine a described continuum of skill growth. The selection of a level of focus along the continuum enables the contextualisation of outcomes and pointers, as detailed in a 'profile' , in appropriate assessment contexts for an approximate 'age and grade'. These contexts then force the refinement of the continuum by demanding a more particular, rather than general, conceptualisation of growth. This enriches the continuum by recognising context as an integral component in describing the development of skills.

The open-endedness of items and the way in which they are scored informs the profile further by recognising levels of student response to an outcome or pointer. The analysis of the fit statistics of the trialled assessment tasks clarifies the relationship between elements (in this case, 'sub-strands') of the profile, and descriptions of item clusters inform the level descriptions of the continuum.

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LEVEL 2 Speaking and Listening

Level 1 outcomes:

1.1 Interacts informally with teachers, peers and known adults in structured classroom activities dealing briefly with familiar topics.

1.2 Shows emerging awareness of school purposes and expectations for using spoken language.

1.3 Draws on implicit knowledge of the linguistic structures and features of own variety of English when expressing ideas and information and interpreting spoken texts.

1.4 Monitors communication of self and others.

Texts

At level 2, a student:

2.1 Interacts in more confident and extended ways in structured and spontaneous school situations.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Explain familiar procedures or give simple instructions to peers showing awareness of the steps required (tell someone how to order lunch, tell a new classmate how things work and where things are, explain to the class how to make something).
- When prompted, extend the contributions of others in group and class discussions (compare their experience of and reactions to an issue with those of others, speculate about other people's reactions in a particular situation, reflect on their own knowledge).
- Listen attentively to and converse with others for a purpose (speak to a teacher about how the use of play equipment is organised, speak to a peer about the habits of snakes or frogs, talk to visiting authors about their books).
- Identify and recount to others the main message of a short spoken text (report to peers on information or an explanation sought from the teacher).
- Describe real or imagined events in logical sequence (retell scenes from stories heard, read or viewed; tell anecdotes about personal experiences; retell a short story, attending to main elements of its plot).
- When prompted, include key information in a short spoken recount of an experience or event (where, when, who, what), for instance, when giving a morning talk to the class.
- Present information on a known topic to a group or the class with some attention to adequacy and relevance of information.
- Listen to and comment positively on the contributions of others in group and class discussions.

Contextual Understanding

At level 2, a student:

2.2 Considers how own speaking and listening is adjusted in different situations.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Discuss the effects different audiences and topics can have on a speaker (compare talking to a friend about a shared experience with talking to the whole class or the principal about the same experience).
- Discuss the reasons for class rules on speaking and listening (those relating to turn-taking, loudness, asking questions).
- Compare ways in which spoken dealings with familiar people vary (roleplay buying something from a shopkeeper, making a special request of a parent, arguing with a sibling, chatting with a friend: consider differences such as tone, pace, pronunciation and body language).
- Consider occasions when they adjust their voice volume according to purpose and situation (telling a secret to a friend, attracting a friend's attention in the playground or library).
- Demonstrate ways to use non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions to show emotions and responses (interest and lack of interest, excitement, shyness, fear).
- Discuss ways in which different kinds of talk can affect other people (calling people by their correct names, encouraging and praising people, being negative or abusive).

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Linguistic Structures & Features

At level 2, a student:

2.3 Experiments with different linguistic structures and features for expressing and interpreting spoken ideas and information.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Understand and use some familiar and appropriate idioms ('you're a star', 'hang on a minute').
- Sometimes use similes to make speech more effective when explaining or describing ('It was just like...').
- Understand and, in speech, experiment with more complex grammatical connectives such as 'because', 'if' and 'after' to sustain a topic and to express ideas.
- Experiment with varying voice tone, volume and pace of speech to indicate emotions, to create excitement, and to emphasise meaning.
- Recognise the beginning and end of a spoken text and try to organise their own speech effectively.
- Try out and interpret sound effects used with spoken texts.
- Experiment with rhyme, rhythm and word play to create humorous effects.
- With teacher guidance, compare grammatical alternatives for expressing similar meanings (compare standard and non-standard constructions).

Strategies

At level 2, a student:

2.4 Speaks and listens in ways that assist communication with others.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Identify a speaker's topic and ask questions seeking explanations or more information ('Where do they live?', 'Do you mean we should ...?')
- Ask questions and make comments that expand ideas during one-to-one, small group and class discussions.
- Seek clarification when something is not understood.
- Clarify comments by rephrasing ('What I meant was ...' and 'When I think about...').
- Plan spoken descriptions, recounts and reports (identify the main ideas or information to be presented to a group or the class).
- Attend to responses of others and review or elaborate on what has been said (answer questions from listeners, repeat or rephrase ideas and information, try to give explanations).
- Observe procedures for class activities (taking turns, asking questions, interrupting speakers).

Level 3 outcomes:

3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.

3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.

3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.

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LEVEL 3 Speaking and Listening

Level 2 outcomes:

2.1 Interacts in more confident and extended ways in structured and spontaneous school situations.

2.2 Considers how own speaking and listening is adjusted in different situations.

2.3 Experiments with different linguistic structures and features for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

2.4 Speaks and listens in ways that assist communication with others.

Texts

At level 3, a student:

3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Create jokes, rhymes, funny stories and word play to entertain themselves and others.
- Retell and offer opinions about scenes from films, drama or stories heard read aloud, with attention to character, setting and plot detail.
- Deliver a prepared short talk to peers on a topic of mutual interest, giving mostly relevant, organised information.
- Exchange perceptions and feelings with peers about similar experiences (compare events in texts with incidents when they have felt jealous, angry, frustrated, excited, awed; recount an event, highlighting significant aspects).
- Listen and respond to peers in problem-solving groups, showing attention to the task (speculate on explanations and solutions, extend others' suggestions, generate plans for completing a task).
- Report briefly to the class on a group discussion or activity (present a list of ideas generated by the group).
- Attempt to persuade others in the class to a point of view or action, presenting a few reasons (why a classroom rule should be changed).
- Listen to and obtain specific information from spoken texts and retell this to others (details from a coach about joining a sports team; information about a character in a short story read aloud by the teacher; information about a familiar topic from a radio broadcast).
- Conduct brief interviews with children and adults to obtain information about an issue or topic (their preferences for the canteen menu).

Contextual Understanding

At level 3, a student:

3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- With teacher guidance, roleplay or view on video different types of spoken language texts—oral or signed reports, story telling, an interview—in order to discuss their purposes and some of their distinguishing features (how parts or stages of a text function in achieving its purpose).
- With teacher guidance, compare the features of different spoken texts and talk about how these are related to purpose or context (consider how the setting in story telling and the beginning of an interview serve an introductory function for listeners; compare the explicitness of telephone conversations with face-to-face discussions).
- Usually select, from a small known range, an appropriate text type for a speaking purpose and explain the choice.
- Keep a record of the purposes and audiences for which they have spoken and the text types they used.
- Compare the features of informal, personal speaking with those of more formal and public purposes and audiences.

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Linguistic Structures & Features

At level 3, a student:

3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Recognise the main organisational elements of group discussions; brainstorming activities, recounts, reports, instructions, and often use these to construct spoken texts.
- Use accurately common grammatical structures such as subject/verb agreement, noun/pronoun agreement, and consistency of tense.
- Express logical relations in speech through the use of linking words such as 'although', 'instead of', 'so that'.
- Interpret and try to use metaphorical language in spoken texts ('That car is a petrol-guzzling monster.').
- Use specialised language on a variety of topics and select words carefully to achieve precise meanings.
- Emphasise their own spoken language by using pauses and repetition effectively.

Strategies

At level 3, a student:

3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Correct their own speech for meaning and accuracy.
- Select and organise ideas before giving a short prepared talk (list main ideas on cue cards).
- Rehearse and modify a talk before presenting it to peers or the class (re-order presentation of ideas, change concluding statement).
- Listen actively to a speaker by attempting to identify the topic and focus, and asking relevant questions.
- Initiate discussion of ideas and issues with the teacher and peers.
- Reflect on and attempt to adopt strategies for effectively taking part in structured small group activities (taking into account other opinions; expanding on others' ideas; asking for and giving explanations and reasons; being tolerant of and responsive to others' contributions; asking peers for more detail on a shared topic; asking questions to gain more information; attempting to solve problems with the group).
- Discuss with peers and the teacher strategies for assisting communication with others in different situations.

Level 4 outcomes:

4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.

4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.

4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.

4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.

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LEVEL 4 Speaking and Listening

Level 3 outcomes:

3.1 Interacts for specific purposes with people in the classroom and school community using a small range of text types.

3.2 Recognises that certain types of spoken texts are associated with particular contexts and purposes.

3.3 Usually uses linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting ideas and information.

3.4 Reflects on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.

Texts

At level 4, a student:

4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Present a strong point of view to friends in a group, offering some considered reasons or arguments.
- Listen attentively and respond constructively to other points of view in group and class discussions.
- Rehearse and tell a story to peers or younger children, using approaches that attempt to engage listeners.
- Prepare and present to the class a detailed account on a known topic, showing attention to quality of content, organisation and method of presentation.
- Prepare and present accurate summaries of decisions reached in group activities (the decisions the group was in favour of and the reasons for them).
- Prepare a short set of questions for an interview seeking information about an issue or topic.
- Offer explanations or lodge complaints which include one or two reasoned arguments.
- Listen and respond to short presentations or arguments that offer alternative viewpoints on a familiar issue (challenge or comment on a point made).
- Identify the main idea and supporting details of a spoken report and summarise it for others (presentations by peers or guest speakers on environmental issues, a current affairs report).

Contextual Understanding

At level 4, a student:

4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Select a suitable text type according to purpose for speaking.
- Recognise and discuss ways that physical conventions are used and understood differently in different socio-cultural contexts (that acceptable distance from others varies according to cultural factors, that eye contact may be regarded as aggressive, insolent or desirable according to context).
- Discuss situations where slang and colloquial language might be considered suitable or unsuitable (at a formal school event or in the news on radio or television).
- Consider when an audience is most likely to expect standard Australian English and discuss reasons.
- Recognise and discuss some indicators of socio-cultural bias or prejudice in spoken texts (a speaker's use of discriminatory language).
- Consider the needs of a familiar audience when preparing a spoken presentation (predict likely questions and prepare answers).

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Linguistic Structures & Features

At level 4, a student:

4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Select, order and organise subject matter clearly for prepared spoken presentations (a report to the class, oral instructions to a group).
- Use conjunctions to interpret and express causal and temporal relationships between ideas in texts.
- Use pace, volume, pronunciation, enunciation and stress to enhance meaning (in a rehearsed reading of a story with dialogue).
- Use body movement, facial expression and gestures to enhance meaning (in a role in a play, telling a story).
- Recognise introductory phrases which indicate that an opinion is being offered ('I believe that...', 'I feel that ...', 'In my opinion....').
- Adopt the grammatical patterns of standard Australian English where suitable (role-playing a television newsreader, making a formal presentation at a school assembly, introducing a guest speaker).

Strategies

At level 4, a student:

4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Tailor information or tone of voice to a listener's reaction (pause to think what to say next, summarise ideas, answer questions).
- Use strategies to assist small-group discussions (invite other group members to contribute; ask questions to help clarify others' viewpoints; negotiate–'So, will we say....?'–to ensure that ideas are clearly understood and developed; justify feelings and opinions; volunteer relevant ideas and information; and elaborate and explain own point of view).
- Identify patterns in people's approaches to communicating (parody or roleplay distinctive communication styles).
- Listen and respond constructively to alternative ideas or viewpoints and express ideas and opinions without dominating discussions.
- Detect strategies speakers use to influence an audience (emotive language, one-sided presentation of information, exaggerated claims).
- Check own interpretation during a discussion by paraphrasing or summarising ('Are you saying....?' 'Do you mean....?').
- Make brief notes or tape record interviews for later review of information.

Level 5 outcomes

5.1 Interacts with peers in structured situations, using a variety of text types to discuss familiar or accessible subjects involving challenging ideas and issues.

5.2 Identifies the effect of context, audience and purpose on spoken texts.

5.3 Discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.

5.4 Listens strategically and systematically records spoken information.

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LEVEL 5 Speaking and Listening

Level 4 outcomes:

4.1 Interacts confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.

4.2 Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations.

4.3 Controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language for interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.

4.4 Assists and monitors the communication patterns of self and others.

Texts

At level 5, a student:

5.1 Interacts with peers in structured situations, using a variety of text types to discuss familiar or accessible subjects involving challenging ideas and issues.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Explore ideas and topics in groups set up by teacher as well as with friends, giving considered reasons for opinions and ideas and listening to those of others.
- Give, to the whole class or a group, succinct accounts of important personal experiences or events and reflect on their significance.
- Give prepared talks to their class on familiar or accessible subjects, pointing out more complex aspects of the topic (world news related to the theme of a novel being studied in class).
- Take part in a range of team speaking situations (readers' theatre and debates), taking responsibility for aspects of the preparation and performing own part in the presentation.
- Listen to a range of sustained material, such as guest speakers, recordings and information videos, on challenging ideas and issues, noting key ideas and information in a systematic way.
- Describe a person or object in detail and with attention to order and sequence so that another student can guess who or what it is (describe a familiar but complicated object so that someone can draw it accurately).

Contextual Understanding

At level 5, a student:

5.2 Identifies the effect of context, audience and purpose on spoken texts.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Understand that speakers have to set the scene and compare the ways people do this in different situations (informal greetings like 'how are you?'; introductions and requests like 'Hullo, my name is... Can you tell me...?' when phoning a stranger; introductions like 'Today I'm going to talk about...' when speaking formally to the class).
- Compare the experience of working with groups of friends with working in teacher-selected groups (the need to overcome distractions such as chatting with friends; the difficulty of being frank with people you don't know or trust or like).
- Show some awareness of the difference between speaking to a small working group and speaking to the whole class (that speech would probably be more formal, less exploratory, and more organised when talking to a larger number of people).
- Show some awareness of the advantages of writing over speaking (comment on the degree of frankness possible in a letter compared to the embarrassment of confronting someone face to face).
- Show some awareness of the disadvantages of writing compared to speaking (a lack of clarity in vocabulary or expression may be compensated for by intonation, gestures, and response from the listener, whereas writing has to be more explicit).

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Linguistic Structures & Features

At level 5, a student:

5.3 Discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Observe and discuss the way that voice and body language affect audiences and can be used to enhance meaning and influence interpretation (the way gestures, posture, facial expression, tone of voice, pace of speaking may engage the audience's interest).
- Note aspects of language use, such as vocabulary, rhythm, similes, which enhance particular spoken texts (by amusing the audience in order to persuade them of a point of view).
- Discuss and experiment with the effect of intonation on meaning (say the same word, phrase or sentence in different ways to convey regret, anger, annoyance, humour).
- Identify the way familiar text types are organised and explain why (logical sequence of events in a spoken account or report assists comprehension; clear conclusion helps listeners focus on the importance of what has been said).
- Recognise statements of attitude and opinion even when they are not clearly identified as opinions (recognise the implicit point of view conveyed by tone of voice and expression in a television interview; recognise that formulations like 'It is quite clear that' express a point of view).
- Discuss the function of colourful language and jargon in language situations such as sports commentaries (to involve listeners in a game's excitement, to give listeners the feeling of being insiders by using jargon and other specialised language).

Strategies

At level 5, a student:

5.4 Listens strategically and systematically records spoken information.

This will be evident when students, for example:

- Prepare for listening (take pen and notebook or laptop computer to the viewing of an information video or to a talk by a guest speaker).
- Note cues such as change of pace and particular words which indicate a new or important point is about to be made.
- Develop and use a personal abbreviation system to record information quickly.
- Select essential ideas and information in a text and note these in point form, one point per line.
- Jot down points in the order made so that information can be readily summarised or interpreted later.

Level 6 outcomes:

6.1 Conveys detailed information and explores different perspectives on complex issues through interacting with known social groups, principally peers, in structured and unstructured situations.

6.2 Identifies ways in which listeners' socio-cultural backgrounds, knowledge and opinions influence the meaning they obtain from spoken texts.

6.3 Experiments with knowledge of linguistic structures and features, and draws on this knowledge to explain how speakers influence audiences.

6.4 Critically evaluates others' spoken texts and uses this knowledge to reflect on and improve own

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APPENDIX 2

THE DART SPEAKING AND LISTENING TASKS

The listening tasks (all on tape) were:
1. listening to three adults discuss a proposed town parade and noting down the route of the parade, the drink stops and the barricades, on a town map. (There were a number of warm-up tasks to familiarise students with the map and reduce the visual-spatial loading of the task.)
2. listening to a mother detailing the information she wants her child to note down when the public announcements are made at a fair and then listening to the announcements for the information; and
3. listening to a children's talk back radio show and noting down the main points made by each speaker.

The performance tasks were:
1. 'poetry', performing 2 poems with a small group of students - each student had to have a speaking part - (preceded by small group discussion in which the poems were selected),
2. 'forum', offering an opinion to the class on a topic selected from 8 topics - (preceded by small group discussion in which the issues were discussed); and
3. 'role play', presenting 2 role plays with a small group of students - each student had to have a speaking part - (preceded by small group discussion in which the scripts that individual students had written for the role plays were discussed).

The small group discussions were poetry, forum, role play, male and female TV roles, and planning a pet show.